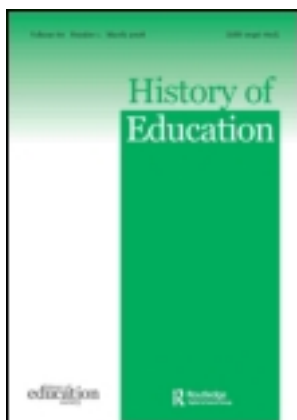


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From HORSAs huts to ROSLA blocks: the school leaving age and the school building programme in England, 1943–1972¹

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This paper examines the connections between the school building programme in England and the raising of the school leaving age (ROSLA) from 14 to 15 in 1947 and then to 16 in 1972. These two major developments were intended to help to ensure the realisation of ‘secondary education for all’ in the postwar period. The combination led in practice to severe strains in the education system as a whole, with lasting consequences for educational planning and central control. ROSLA was a key issue for the school building programme in terms of both finance and design. School building was also a significant constraint for ROSLA, which was marred by temporary expedients in building accommodation both in the 1940s with ‘HORSAs huts’ and in the 1970s with ‘ROSLA blocks’, as well as by the cheap construction of new schools that soon became unfit for purpose. Together, school building needs and ROSLA helped to stimulate pressures towards centralisation of planning that were ultimately to undermine postwar partnerships in education, from the establishment of the Ministry of Education’s Architects and Building (A&B) Branch in 1948, through the Crowther Report of 1959 and the Newsom Report of 1963, to the assertion of central state control by the 1970s. The pressures arising from such investment and growth in education again became a key issue in the early twenty-first century with the Labour Government’s support for raising the participation age to 18 combined with an ambitious ‘Building Schools for the Future’ programme. The historical and contemporary significance of these developments has tended to be neglected but is pivotal to an understanding of medium-term educational change in its broader policy and political contexts.

Keywords: architecture; educational reform; school; secondary education; policy

Introduction

The raising of the school leaving age in Britain from 14 to 15 in 1947 and then to 16 in 1972 took place during a period when major developments were under way in relation to school building, design, financing and planning. The capital expenditure programmes involved in postwar education policy were among the largest of the reconstruction programmes competing with transport and housing for ever increasing,

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¹We are most grateful to the ESRC for its support for the research project ‘Raising the School Leaving Age: Participation and Policy in Historical Perspective’ (RES-062-23-1494) on which the current paper is based. It has also developed from a presentation to the History of Education Society (UK) annual conference at Sheffield in December 2009; our thanks to participants at this conference for their valuable feedback.

yet precious, financial, labour and material resources.² This paper examines the inter-connections between the politics of school building and raising the school leaving age in England in this period. In particular, it investigates the reasons for the development of HORSAs in the 1940s and ROSLA blocks in the 1960s and 1970s as ways of accommodating the successive increases in the school leaving age.

Issues of school building and construction were central to considerations of public policy and education rather than simply technical or implementation issues of local concern. Building for ROSLA had implications for a general postwar shift towards central control over the education service, a trend that accelerated in the 1960s. It also connected closely to the changing structure of secondary education, particularly with the so-called 'tripartite' system of schooling based on selection at the age of 11 becoming widespread in the late 1940s and 1950s, but then giving way to comprehensive schools designed for all pupils from the 1960s onwards.³ The issue of selective versus comprehensive routes was politically contested and meant that building policy inescapably also assumed a political character. Accommodating larger cohorts of pupils in appropriate buildings was a highly charged issue that impacted directly upon education politics and choices.

There has long been interest in raising the school leaving age, which is unsurprising given that it was raised to 11 in 1893, 12 in 1899, 14 in 1918, 15 in 1947, 16 in 1972 and in 2008 legislation was passed to increase the 'participation' age in education and training to 17 by 2013 and 18 by 2015. The ROSLA process was also an international phenomenon, and the English experience had affinities with developments in other countries. The immediate postwar period was marked by the widespread development of 'secondary education for all' when education systems were being extended to whole populations. In the English context this meant the demise of the elementary school and the promotion of equality of opportunity. In addition, the notion of education as a personal and social investment had long been invoked by reformers keen to extend schooling to the working classes and these arguments were intensified during the postwar years of considerable economic and educational expansion across developed countries. Although economic fortunes have fluctuated since the 1970s, an international educational discourse revolving around competitiveness and human capital has become entrenched. By the 1970s most developed countries had a leaving age of 15 or 16 and some would later extend this to 18.⁴

While these changes have given rise to heated debate among educationists and politicians, more reflective historical contributions on the longer term significance of the issue have been notably absent.⁵ Although compulsion has been a foundation upon which the modern educational system has been constructed,⁶ very little critical

²Nicholas Bullock, *Building the Post-War World* (London: Routledge, 2002), 183, 184. Also, for issues relating to allocations of economic resources, Nathan Rosenberg, *Economic Planning and the British Building Industry – 1945–49* (Philadelphia, 1961), chs 2 & 4.

³See e.g., A. Kerckhoff, K. Fogelman, D. Crook and D. Reeder, *Going Comprehensive in England and Wales: A Study of Uneven Change* (London: Woburn Press, 1996).

⁴For an early, general historical background see I. Kandel, *Raising the School Leaving Age* (Paris: UNESCO, 1951).

⁵See Malcolm Seaborne, 'The Historical Background', in *The Extra Year: The Raising of the School Leaving Age*, ed. J.W. Tibble (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971).

⁶Pavla Miller, 'Historiography of Compulsory Schooling: What is the Problem?', *History of Education* 18, no. 2 (1989): 123–44. Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: the Rise of Education Systems in England, France and the USA* (London: Macmillan, 1990).

academic attention has been given to the successive phases of the raising of the school leaving age even though it had wide-ranging implications in a number of areas.⁷ General historical accounts tend to mention it in passing rather than discuss it in detail.⁸ The school leaving age has been an assumption upon which some historical studies of policy, curriculum and pedagogy have been based.⁹ However, recent policy developments have begun to stimulate some interest in previous initiatives.¹⁰

In historiographical terms, then, the school leaving age rose without trace. The general lack of historical purchase on ROSLA since the late nineteenth century suggests that as a theme it was quietly absorbed into the familiar storyline of Whig educational historiography. It tended to be taken for granted as inevitable, incremental, gradual, consensual and progressive in character, and overall as part of the broader triumph of modern schooling in achieving social progress.¹¹ Yet, ROSLA has often been contentious, controversial and vigorously debated. Harold Silver has pointed out that attitudes towards compulsory schooling in England in the 1870s changed radically from 'mountainous opposition' at the time of the Elementary Education Act of 1870 to broad support by the end of the decade, and that this radical shift in opinion was far from inevitable.¹² The history of later extensions to compulsory schooling similarly warrants detailed investigation. When related to their broader policy and political contexts, indeed, debates around ROSLA in the period after the Second World War rival those involving comprehensive reorganisation for the understanding that they can yield on the nature of medium-term educational change.

The history of the postwar British school building programmes has been extensively and authoritatively covered from two distinct sources. The first was a stream of publications emanating from within the Ministry of Education (from 1964 the Department of Education and Science, DES) and its Architects and Building Branch (A&B). An example of these is the 1957 pamphlet *The Story of Post-War School Building*, which offered a historical review of the work that the Ministry had been undertaking since the war.¹³ Another series of publications issued by the Ministry was the *Building Bulletins*, which reported on practical, partnered projects between the A&B Branch and particular urban and county education authorities. These

⁷Nigel Norris, 'Raising the School Leaving Age', *Cambridge Journal of Education* 37, no. 4 (2007): 471–2.

⁸For example Brian Simon, *Education and the Social Order 1940–1990* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1991); and Roy Lowe, *The Death of Progressive Education: How Teachers Lost Control of the Classroom* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁹For example, Dennis J. O'Keefe, 'Towards a Socio-Economy of the Curriculum', *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 9, no. 2 (1977): 101–9; R. Moore and M. Hickox, 'Vocationalism and Educational Change', *Curriculum Journal* 5, no. 3 (1994): 281–93.

¹⁰David Crook, 'Compulsory Education in the United Kingdom: Historical, Comparative and Contemporary Perspectives', *Journal of Educational Planning and Administration* 19, no. 3 (2005): 397–414; Robin Simmons, 'Raising the Age of Compulsory Education in England: A NEET Solution?', *British Journal of Educational Studies* 56, no. 4 (2008): 420–39; and James Kewin et al., *Lessons from History* (Reading: CfBT, 2009).

¹¹See for example Gary McCulloch, *The Struggle for the History of Education* (London: Routledge, 2011) on the traditional approach to the history of education as a struggle for social progress.

¹²Harold Silver, 'Education, Opinion and the 1870s', in *Education as History: Interpreting Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Education* (London: Methuen, 1983), 85–6.

¹³Ministry of Education, *The Story of Post-War School Building*, pamphlet no. 33 (London: HMSO, 1957).

Bulletins were primarily directed towards educational decision-makers at local and regional levels, practising architects and, more widely, those within the commercial building world who had an interest in securing and working on school building projects. Key figures within A&B Branch also supplied the educational press with regular stories about new initiatives so that widely read journals such as the weekly *Education*, which was distributed to every LEA office, school staffroom and college in Britain, rarely appeared without some features focusing upon school building and design.¹⁴ A further source of this kind has been the 'Reports on Education' regularly issued by DES and intended for far wider circulation and readerships than the *Building Bulletins*.¹⁵

The second type of sources on school building is a number of academic studies which sought to assess a tradition of design and building that was coming under increasing criticism in the years after secondary schools had expanded to accommodate full cohorts of 'fifth formers' following the implementation of the decision to extend compulsory schooling in the 1972–1973 school year. Major critical assessments of the work and legacy of those directing school building policy were produced during the 1970s and 1980s such as the 1987 study of the social role of school architecture and building in postwar Britain by Andrew Saint,¹⁶ and the more overtly political approach of Stuart Maclure in 1984,¹⁷ which examined aspects of public policy, school development and building. Such authors benefited from direct contact with many of the leading actors within the Ministry and LEAs, and there is a marked tendency for them to reflect the aspirations of these people. We have sought to augment these two sources with an extensive re-examination of internal Ministry and Cabinet papers from the National Archives and elsewhere, sometimes using original and personally inscribed copies of documents used by senior officers and politicians and other archival evidence. When examining such sources it becomes clear that educational planning and thinking were closely connected with other areas such as housing, local government and social services, a point amply brought out by Nicholas Bullock in his *Building the Post-War World* in which he places educational and housing design and policy alongside each other.¹⁸ The present contribution explores the relationship between school building policy and other educational developments during the period, rather than remaining as closely tied to considerations of design and architectural issues as previous commentators have done. This is also in the spirit of other new cutting-edge

¹⁴The bulk of the weekly journal of the Association of *Education* Committees, *Education*, May 29, 1964, is taken up with building and facilities issues and advertisements. The August 13 and September 24 1965 issues consider *Building Bulletin* No. 25, which deals with sixth forms and staff in secondary school design.

¹⁵See issues 18 (January 1965), 27 (December 1965), 52 (January 1969), 66 (October 1970), 71 (August 1971), 83 (April 1975) for topics closely related to the focus of the current paper.

¹⁶A. Saint, *Towards a Social Architecture: The Role of School Building in Post-war England* (London: Yale University Press, 1987).

¹⁷S. Maclure, *Educational Development and School Building: Aspects of Public Policy 1945–73* (London: Longman, 1984); H. Jones, "'This is Magnificent!' 300,000 Houses a Year and the Tory Revival after 1945", *Contemporary British History* 14, no. 1 (2000): 99–121; and P. Weiler, 'The Rise and Fall of the Conservatives' "Grand Design for Housing", 1951–64', *Contemporary British History* 14, no. 1 (2000): 122–50.

¹⁸Bullock, *Building the Post War World*, Ch. 8.

research engaging with interdisciplinary insights and methods relating to school buildings in their broader environments included in a recent special issue of *History of Education*.¹⁹

Spens to Horsa 1930s and 1940s

The failure of successive interwar governments to fulfil the aspirations of the 1918 Education Act to extend education through day continuation colleges became one of the key issues within discussions about framing a new settlement for 1945. The Spens Report on secondary education, published in 1938, argued that:

The adoption of a minimum leaving age of 16 years, which is now the rule in Grammar Schools, may not be immediately practicable, but in our judgement must even now be envisaged as inevitable.²⁰

This helps to explain why, despite the severe financial pressures facing Clement Attlee's Labour government after the Second World War, the Minister of Education, Ellen Wilkinson, was able to secure a decision to implement Section 35 of the 1944 Act to raise the leaving age to 15, although this would not take place until 1947. The decision acted on an earlier commitment to raise the age to 15 in 1939, which had been postponed due to the impending international crisis.²¹ However, the 1944 Act went further and contained a delayed clause for ROSLA to 16.²²

Taking the decision was fraught with difficulty, because the means by which it became a practical proposition was fiercely opposed by representative voices that were otherwise in favour of extending secondary education for all. Wilkinson described the dilemma she faced in a letter to the former Labour President of the Board of Education Sir Charles Trevelyan, himself a longstanding and strong advocate of ROSLA:

As you will have seen from the Press, I am making my first major job the raising of the school leaving age to 15. This means the provision of extra classroom accommodation. We have had to do that as a war operation, putting through a global order for prefabricated huts to the Ministry of Works and letting them to Local Education Authorities on very attractive terms: this is the only way in which we could deal with that immediate programme. If it is satisfactory, it may be possible to extend it to deal with other forms of overcrowding.

The question of the building of permanent schools must wait until the housing situation has eased a little. It is not only that it has taken all the weight I could bring to bear upon the Cabinet to get this extra provision for classrooms, but I should not myself find it within my conscience to take away labour from housing when we could manage quite easily with these prefabricated huts.²³

¹⁹C. Burke, P. Cunningham and I. Grosvenor, eds, "Putting Education in its Place": Space, Place and Materialities in the History Of Education', special issue of *History of Education*, 39, no. 6 (2010).

²⁰Board of Education, *Report of the Consultative Committee on Secondary Education* (Spens Report) (London: HMSO, 1938), Chapter IX, Part V, Section 19.

²¹A date had actually been fixed to raise the school leaving age by April 1, 1939.

²²Education Act, 1944, Section 35.

²³Ellen Wilkinson (Minister of Education) to C.P. Trevelyan, October 1, 1945 (Trevelyan papers, University of Newcastle, CPT 161).

The proposal on offer from the government was to adapt the existing Ministry of Works temporary huts in order to accommodate at least half of the anticipated additional 400,000 post-14-year-olds within the system. Some of these extra pupils were absorbed by internal modifications to existing buildings such as partitioning larger spaces and extensions. Others benefited from the first wave of new-build schools arising from local school development plans.

Ministry guidelines issued to LEAs in May 1945 regarding the Hutting Operation for Raising the School Leaving Age (HORSA) appeared to critics to preempt and compromise local development plans, especially as the proposed huts were considered to be, in the words of A.R. Maxwell-Hyslop, 'aesthetically revolting and a blot on the countryside; nor are they now so cheap or so quick to build'.²⁴ This verdict by the former secretary to the Wood Committee, which in 1943 had investigated potential methods of construction in anticipation of the postwar circumstances, reflected both wider public concerns and the ideas of many with direct planning experience within government. The Ministry of Works Report, *Standard Construction For Schools*, published in 1944,²⁵ which was based on the Wood Committee's findings, advocated light-framed, prefabricated methods and had become the basis for thinking within some progressive LEAs such as Hertfordshire, which was working on a variant of the ideas. The HORSA programme threatened to compromise this emerging approach as variations on the hutted scheme began to appear, such as in Wrotham in Kent where the entire new 'temporary' school was constructed from three lengthened HORSA-type buildings with just one separate shed to house the school's head and secretary. The significance of this arrangement was that the new fourth-year group was to be assimilated into a general school structure and timetable, rather than have special and distinctive provision made for it. This development challenged some of the baseline assumptions underpinning the prewar arguments in favour of ROSLA for older adolescents who, it was envisaged, would follow vocationally structured continuation courses.

However, more sympathetic observers felt that such temporary provision at least gave breathing space for county plans to be undertaken at greater leisure, thus allowing more time for educational ideas to influence school design along different lines. One such voice was that of Miss C.E.V. Gordon, who wrote two feature pieces within the *Times Educational Supplement* in which she proposed that:

... the class unit be destroyed as the basis for organization and that there be substituted a) large group instruction, b) small study groups, c) groups of 15–20 children working in the practical room ... the school day can, it is submitted, be thus organized, providing the building has been designed especially to meet these needs.²⁶

²⁴A.R. Maxwell-Hyslop, note, September 10, 1945 (Ministry of Education papers, National Archives, ED 150/23).

²⁵Ministry of Works, *Standard Construction For Schools*, Post-War Building Studies No. 2 (London: HMSO, 1944). On the Wood committee see Bullock (2002), 184–5.

²⁶Two feature articles by C.E.V. Gordon appeared in the *TES* on October 12 and 26, 1946 alongside editorial features supported by editorial comment pieces.

Political considerations drove the timing of the HORSA announcement, rather than the professional concerns within LEAs. Deputy Prime Minister Herbert Morrison, leading in Cabinet on the government's legislative programme, acknowledged that:

We are satisfied that the raising of the leaving age will be generally regarded as a test of the Government's sincerity and that for political reasons we must stick to the date provided for in the Education Act.²⁷

For Morrison and Wilkinson, if three conditions could be met, ROSLA to 15 should proceed. The first of these was that any measures taken to accommodate the new 15-year-old cohort should not divert scarce building workers from other prioritised reconstruction work. The second was that a sufficient supply of teachers would be available. Third, the proposed standards for temporary accommodation had to be acceptable to the Ministry. Morrison also recognised that LEA school development plans might be jeopardised and so 'it is essential that not a moment should be lost in extracting skilled technical staff from the services'.²⁸

Therefore the eventual raising of the school leaving age took place in 1947 against a backdrop of concern regarding accommodation issues and widespread dismay at the type of building being made available. Within professional circles there was the additional fear that short-term expediency would affect the progress of local school development plans, and indeed by 1949 implementation plans for ROSLA had been delayed in many places by a whole year. Broader educational developments exacerbated these problems, in particular the need to provide for the much larger than usual annual school intakes which started from 1942 as well as the primary need to repair war-damaged school sites. Moreover, severe economic shortages curtailed any aspirations for wide-ranging social policies. This scenario was a far cry from the social optimism implied within Section 35 of the 1944 Act. Yet out of this difficult period, the Architects and Building Branch would emerge within the Ministry of Education.

Creation of the A&B Branch

One of the LEAs that fought a rearguard action against the HORSA programme was Hertfordshire where, under the directorship of John Newsom,²⁹ an innovative and progressive county architects' team was busily adapting the ideas contained in the Wood Committee's report. These architects, including Stirrat Johnson-Marshall, Mary Crowley, David Medd, James Nisbett and Dan Lacey, were to become major influences on postwar educational building and design. One of the innovations of this Hertfordshire group was in seeking a consistent and integrated method of design and construction across the whole schools development plan for the county, rather than treating each project separately. This helped to save time, and Hertfordshire's first completed new-build projects opened as early as 1947. Despite Newsom's opposition to the HORSA programme, nearly 600 of these double classroom units were erected across the county's secondary schools, exerting a negative

²⁷Cabinet Minutes 1 September 1945, 1–5, 25th Conclusions, minute 3 (Cabinet Papers, National Archives, CAB.129/1).

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹David Parker, *John Newsom: A Hertfordshire Educationist* (London: Barnes & Noble, 2005).

impact on the unity and coherence of the county's schools development plan. Many of these HORSAs were attached to un-reorganised elementary schools purely to provide separate accommodation for the older children. This was widely perceived to be inadequate, both educationally and architecturally, but this pragmatic approach was to be repeated in later years. At the same time, the experience also fuelled a nascent and innovative vision of school building that encompassed the whole secondary age cohort.

The success of Newsom's architectural group in completing schools and creating a robust administrative and financial framework led to the head-hunting of Johnson-Marshall as chief architect by the Ministry's new A&B Branch in 1948. Joining him from the Hertfordshire group in 1949 were Mary Crowley, her husband David Medd, and, equally significantly for the present history of expanding secondary schools, James Nisbett, who was a quantity surveyor. These key figures formed the core of Johnson-Marshall's Ministry of Education project development group, which would work in partnership with a number of LEAs to implement and extend some of the design, construction and costing innovations pioneered during their time in Hertfordshire. The idea was to use such projects as examples of effective practice and to sponsor, from the centre, certain standards and approaches. The development group formed under Newsom thus established an unrivalled position at the heart of the Ministry of Education, and one of its early priorities was to address the full range of issues presented by the expanding secondary schools that were called for within the 1944 Act.

Dissemination of the thinking within A&B Branch took place primarily through the seminal *Building Bulletins*, which described such projects in detail for their professional readerships. At the heart of the new approach was a commitment to delivering secondary schools under existing cost limits by reducing the non-teaching, internal circulation spaces and opening up large hall spaces for multiple uses as gymnasias and dining areas. By building flexible areas clustered in groups, corridor spaces could be reduced to a minimum. The prewar 'finger' style layout of classrooms arranged in a long line with a corridor extending the entire length ceased to be the basic structure. Also, by attending to every detail within the building, however small, economies could be achieved such as striking deals with ceramics manufacturers to provide specially down-sized lavatory and washing units adapted for children, instead of purchasing more expensive standard-sized units.³⁰

A key feature of this period was the essentially consultative and advisory relationship between the Ministry and professionals within LEAs, with the balance of power shifting in favour of the centre through the exercise of ever tightening cost-limits. Key decisions that were to affect fundamentally the pattern of secondary schooling across the country were in effect being taken within a framework designed and controlled from the Ministry. Not only was local autonomy being compromised, but it was tacitly being conceded that only nationally coordinated action led by central government could address mounting problems.³¹

The need for a major secondary building programme was clear in the face of the growing numbers due to arrive in secondary schools by the mid-1950s. The

³⁰Saint (1987), 80–4.

³¹Education, editorial, 'Week by Week', by William Alexander, September 6, 1963, called for greater integration of government planning across sectors within the education system, although Alexander was also a champion of local autonomy.

impact of an extra year group following ROSLA in 1947 had also been crucial. In many areas, the sudden arrival of new populations in suburbs and new towns necessitated the creation of new schools. Another trend that began to emerge during the 1950s, albeit differentially across the country, was for voluntary staying on to 16 and a reduction in early leaving, which especially affected the size of grammar school sixth forms. New-builds were possible where open space was easily available but less so in densely built-up urban areas. This led to a sometimes sharp variation in the quality of secondary schools. Some expanded within cramped sites centred on an ageing former elementary board school with a variety of additions inherited from the past, whilst elsewhere bright new schools were erected in spacious grounds, often set on the outskirts of town. This led to another organisational distinction between purpose-built schools located on a new site and multi-site schools made up from a range of buildings originally designed for other purposes in past eras. The growth of the upper age groups within secondary schools, as a result of both ROSLA and voluntary staying on, was therefore experienced unevenly across the country and was exacerbated by the tendency of A&B Branch and many LEAs to focus primarily upon urgently needed green-field projects. The number of new-builds of secondary schools rose from just three in 1947 to a peak of 375 in 1958, falling back somewhat after this but still numbering 187 in 1964.³² Over 3,000 new secondary schools were built in the 18 years from 1947 with designs based on an assumption of year groups from the age of 11 to 15. In the case of grammar schools, the assumption was for a majority of voluntary stayers with an add-on academic sixth form. The small number of technical schools³³ that were built in counties such as Kent tended to develop into quasi-grammar types, retaining larger percentages of post-15 pupils than the modern or comprehensive schools. School sizes were based on anticipated primary school rolls so with the three-year lead time from commission to delivery, in areas of shifting populations such as expanding suburbs, some schools were to experience overcrowding almost as soon as they were opened, whilst others located within the 'inner cities' were to experience falling rolls due to loss of populations.

By the time that the Conservative Government made the political decision to implement ROSLA to 16 in early 1964, the new system was already exhibiting structural imbalances of which the increasingly centralised Ministry and its A&B Branch had failed to take sufficient account. In part this arose out of the tight cost limits instituted within the Ministry, which permitted LEAs to proceed with new projects as long as the plans conformed to maximum spending limits. This regime restricted scope for flexibility and led almost everywhere to a second spate of 'temporary' huddled accommodation being erected in secondary schools, often to house growing numbers of fourth and fifth formers. These 15- and 16-year-olds were being assimilated into conventional school timetables and regimes, rather than being offered distinctive curricular experiences and facilities that were the focus of extensive discussions in Schools Council ROSLA studies.³⁴

³²DES, *Table of Numbers of New-build Schools 1947–1964*, Reports on Education, No. 71 (London: HMSO, 1971).

³³See G. McCulloch, *The Secondary Technical School: A Usable Past?* (London: Falmer, 1989).

³⁴Schools Council, *Raising the School Leaving Age*, Working Paper No. 2 (London: HMSO, 1965), 10–23.

The Crowther and Newsom Reports

These issues were to the fore in the thinking of the Central Advisory Council for England (CAC(E) – there were separate equivalents covering Wales and Scotland) and had been a feature of every report related to this age group published since 1947. Two landmark Reports of the CAC(E), chaired respectively by Geoffrey Crowther (1959) and John Newsom (1963), made detailed reference to the specific needs relating to ROSLA.

The fact that provision for ROSLA to 16 was a statute made it possible to move the debate from ‘if’ to ‘when’ and ‘how’. For Crowther’s investigation into the educational needs of the 15–18 age range, two issues, which were intended to be complementary, emerged in opposition to each other: that of whether the priority should be ROSLA to 16, or a move towards establishing a national network of county colleges that had also been provided for in sections 43–46 of the 1944 Act. The Act was based on the vision of a seamless transition from school after 16 into a combination of work and day-continuation training which would centre on the new county colleges. During the consultation phase of the Crowther enquiry, ROSLA to 16 and county colleges came to be posited as alternatives against a continuing background of discussion about limited budgets at a time of historic growth across the entire system in response to the baby-bulge. The tensions became apparent in a written submission to the CAC(E) by the Association of Chief Education Officers:

Despite the difficulties of the bulge, it is apparent that an increasing proportion of children will remain in secondary modern and comprehensive schools for a fifth year course; this proportion may amount to one-third of the 15–16 age group by 1965.... One of the imponderables in the situation is the extent to which re-organization will be completed. It is lamentable that at the moment little or no progress is being made in this direction.³⁵

The CEOs were clear that they were not prepared to go through a repeat of the improvised and unplanned experience of ROSLA to 15 in 1947. They identified the trend towards higher voluntary rates of staying on, but were not keen for the school system to accommodate large numbers of older pupils who did not wish to remain within the system.

By the mid-1950s the three-stage structure envisaged by the Act continued to lie dormant. This is not altogether surprising in view of the extreme demands being made upon school buildings to provide basic provision for the expanding primary and secondary school sectors. The optimistic vision for the future of further education in county colleges³⁶ was fading from view. The designers of the 1944 Act, following the recommendations of the Spens Report, had envisaged a structure that was able to cater appropriately for the older cohorts who might eventually be required to remain at school until 16. This implied different types of institutions, hence the adoption of the nomenclature of ‘college’ rather than ‘school’ to cater for most of the 15/16–18-year-olds leaving modern or comprehensive schools. By the end of the consultation period the Crowther committee found that while most Associations were ‘tempered with a realism’, they remained clear that the two phases were linked and

³⁵ACEO, submission to Crowther committee, 9–10 (Ministry of Education papers, National Archives, ED 146/31).

³⁶Ministry of Education, *Youth's Opportunity: Further Education in County Colleges*, pamphlet No. 3 (London: HMSO, 1946).

that ROSLA to 16 should be accompanied by building county colleges.³⁷ The final Report, however, came down unequivocally in favour of ROSLA to 16 as soon as was practically possible. It identified an absolute need for a more developed secondary school building programme alongside expanded teacher training before the implementation of ROSLA to 16, as prerequisites for further 'advance'.³⁸

After Crowther, the school building programme moved ahead under the assumption of ROSLA to 16 at some point in the future, but under no requirement to create actual capacity in all newly built or adapted schools. Such a requirement was only made after a new Labour government came to power in 1964. This was to have profound effects when, after 1972/3, the fifth formers arrived in their full numbers, especially in locations where voluntary staying on had not been as high as elsewhere.

The CAC(E) continued its intensive programme of educational planning after the Crowther Report, focusing in particular under John Newsom on the anticipated character and needs of older working-class pupils who would be compelled to remain within school until the age of 16. David Eccles and Edward Boyle, the two senior Conservative ministers who commissioned this work, were concerned that few schools were prepared to offer a coherent and meaningful curriculum for such pupils. The remit of the Newsom Committee reflects the remaining ambivalence concerning the institutional setting that was to be put in place for older working-class pupils:

... education between the ages of 13 and 16 of pupils of average or less than average ability who are or will be following full-time courses either at schools or in establishments of further education.³⁹

There appears to be a view of seamless progression between school and FE sectors or at least some forms of sharing and interrelatedness, which would remain a complicated issue until agreement was reached on the leaving age.⁴⁰ Hence the unequivocal first recommendation of the Newsom Report that a date be set for the leaving age to be raised to 16.⁴¹ Two sections of *Half Our Future* are of particular interest for the present paper, chapters 11 and 25. The first of these outlined design and building options for the age group under consideration, while the second reported on a survey of existing provision around the country. The survey placed schools

³⁷Summary of views of Associations. P. 1 (Ministry of Education papers, National Archives, ED 146/3, item CAC(E) 95/1500)

³⁸Ministry of Education, *15 To 18* (Crowther Report) (London: HMSO, 1959).

³⁹Ministry of Education, *Half our Future* (Newsom Report) (London: HMSO, 1963), xv.

⁴⁰See Birkenhead reorganisation proposals; an example of the planning problems that could occur between the DES. and a creative and responsive local education authority (Ministry of Education papers, National Archives, ED 207/48). The proposed scheme followed the Newsom Report's thinking and the flexibility encouraged in Circular 10/65 proposing to operate two sites acting as link institutions between schools and the colleges offering day release for all Secondary school fifth-form pupils. The Ministry denied approval on the grounds that the law did not allow for a blurring of demarcation between school and FE attendance.

⁴¹Newsom Report, xiii.

into four groups: satisfactory specialist accommodation; some specialist accommodation, but inadequate in quantity; makeshift accommodation; and no provision. Such a categorisation implied that the identified deficits could be mitigated through adaptations and extension without major alterations to the core school structure. Roughly 50% of the surveyed schools in the sample revealed significant deficits in what were described as 'practical subjects'.⁴² Rural studies, woodwork and metalwork all suffered from a lack of provision.⁴³ Girls' schools were identified as being particularly prone to deficits in specialist areas. The only explicitly mentioned 'practical' subject targeted at girls was 'housecraft', with no mention of typing or office/secretarial training facilities.⁴⁴ These restrictions reflected wider silences concerning the education of girls. In addition, only 28% of schools were deemed to satisfy more than two-thirds of the criteria for adequacy, with 56% falling into the category of having between one- and two-thirds of the facilities deemed necessary. An alarming 16% were considered to have less than one-third of the specialist facilities necessary for a secondary curriculum to be delivered.⁴⁵ When external facilities were also taken into account, only 21% of secondary schools were assessed as being 'generally up to present standards' while a worrying 41% were deemed to be 'seriously deficient in many respects'. These contemporary and authoritative assessments help to place into perspective why the body of professional opinion argued for physical accommodation as an essential prerequisite of ROSLA to 16. The idea of adding a further year group onto the pattern of existing deficits would merely aggravate the unsatisfactory situation that had pertained since 1947.

The Newsom Report noted starkly that: 'About four fifths of schools in the modern school sample fall short of the currently accepted standards, and these are the standards which we regard as inappropriate to the needs of the pupils with whom we are concerned.'⁴⁶ What is striking about this summary is that by the date of the survey LEAs had delivered just over two and a half thousand new-build secondary schools. The Report, no doubt reflecting thinking within A&B Branch, was unequivocal regarding what was needed, arguing that 'the nature of the new educational solutions that are needed will involve major alterations in current school design'.⁴⁷

One factor which began to become apparent to those surveying schools on behalf of the Newsom committee was that the 1949 and 1957 tightening of the cost limits for secondary school buildings had produced internal spaces that were unsuited for expanded cohorts of 15- and 16-year-olds. The changes can be seen by contrasting the generous 45 square feet per secondary place allocated for internal circulation space with the 9 square feet per place imposed from the centre in 1957. Ways of thinking that had developed essentially for the modern primary school were being applied to buildings for much older and bigger pupils. A definitive resolution to this growing problem was needed but that could only come when a clear political decision had been taken regarding a date for ROSLA to 16. The Newsom Report was all too aware of this issue:

⁴²Ibid., 253.

⁴³Ibid., Chapter 25.

⁴⁴Ibid., Chapter 25.

⁴⁵Ibid., 258.

⁴⁶Ibid., 87.

⁴⁷Ibid., 87.

... it would be educationally wrong, and an unwise use of resources, to build or remodel so many schools to meet yesterday's needs. ... We believe that a boldly experimental approach is needed not only to establish educational needs, and the means of reflecting them in a new physical environment, but also as a basis for formulating future policy for school building.⁴⁸

These constraints could go hand-in-hand with innovative approaches. For instance, the iconic 'new brutalist' concrete building of Pimlico School located in Westminster, although commissioned in 1964, reflected older assumptions concerning classroom spaces rather than the thinking that was animating the Newsom Committee.⁴⁹ Many felt that this building (demolished in 2008) was already redundant before it came into use.

Indeed, the Newsom Report advocated differentiated education for its target group of older pupils of average and less than average ability. It included a diagram of a centre designed to house up to 120 'young adults' consisting of:

A central entrance space and snack counter; to the right the lavatories (with a powder room for the girls), and lockers for all personal belongings; to the left, three common rooms. Two of these are connected by sliding folding doors so that a larger space can be made available for a dance or a lecture. Each room has window seats in bays for small conversational groups, shelves for books and magazines, individual study or writing places, comfortable chairs, carpets and curtains.⁵⁰

Here was a vision of self-directed and motivated young adults cooperating on various types of ongoing projects in an environment that was more or less separate and freed from the regime of the wider school, which catered for younger pupils. It blurred the lines between learning and recreation in a quasi-professional setting signified by soft furnishings, carpets and magazines. These ideas anticipated the semi-annually important *Building Bulletin No. 32* published in 1967, entitled 'Additions for the Fifth Form', which presented to head teachers, governors and LEA officers a series of developed ideas for special units to accommodate the new cohorts of 16-year-olds. These came to be known as ROSLA blocks. This option offered considerable advantages given the projected cohort of 350,000 additional pupils, who would only attract a limit of £286.00 each, within an overall budget of £100 million between the years 1967 and 1971.⁵¹

⁴⁸Ibid., 88.

⁴⁹Ward (1983), 111–16.

⁵⁰Newsom Report (1963), 95.

⁵¹In correspondence between the Treasury and Ministry of Education, the sum of £100 million to be spent on buildings in order to cope with the impact of ROSLA had been projected as early as December 1963 (Ministry of Education papers, National Archives, ED 23/1110). By the mid-1960s, this figure was embedded as a benchmark around which plans were to be constructed. In January 1964, the Treasury had produced a set of negative financial assessments of ROSLA designed to persuade Cabinet from taking the decision, with annual expenditure from 1969 to 1972 on capital costs related to ROSLA projected as £150 million (Draft memorandum by Chancellor of Exchequer, 'The school leaving age', January 1964, Ministry of Education papers, ED 23/1110).

Decision, delay and implementation 1964–1972

The implementation of ROSLA to 16, decided by the Conservative Government in 1964, was postponed to 1972 under spending cuts agreed by the Labour Government in early 1968. During this period from 1964 to 1972 the implications of ROSLA for the school building programme again came under detailed scrutiny, and were the subject of much debate as to immediate requirements. By October 1965 A&B Branch had prepared a memorandum extending a full 13 pages on the implications of ROSLA to 16 in which J.A. Hudson, the joint head of A&B Branch, outlined a proposal to all LEAs for a national agency to deliver prefabricated units to school sites for assembly in the shortest time possible.⁵² It was beginning to look like a replay of the financial and administrative arrangements of 1947 and Hudson made explicit comparisons to this earlier situation.

LEAs were already in a difficult position because of the need to respond to the call for comprehensive reorganisation and also broader demographic shifts. In this situation, Hudson suggested, the idea of LEAs working in broader consortia to deliver ROSLA ‘deserves serious and early consideration’.⁵³ He concluded by noting the problems that ROSLA would involve:

We recognize that the choice of materials and building techniques available today, and the changes in educational ideas over the last twenty years would call for buildings a good deal more sophisticated than the HORSAs hut: and the difficulties arising from the probable variations in the pattern of school organization between authorities may well make the job of devising standardized buildings a good deal more complicated than would otherwise be the case.⁵⁴

The solution would therefore be handed over to the architects within the branch, now headed by William Lacey who had worked in both Hertfordshire and Nottinghamshire. The fear within the Ministry was that LEAs would ‘take the easy way out and, ignoring the educational requirements . . . put up rows of huts’.⁵⁵

One possible solution might have been to establish a national agency to coordinate the building programme, a proposal that harked back to the 1940s as it ‘would involve an enterprise for which there is no parallel for almost 20 years’.⁵⁶ However, this approach was recognised to be ‘extreme’ because it would shift decision-making and autonomy away from the LEAs ‘as we should need to maintain a firm and consistent policy from now on for several years’.⁵⁷ A&B Branch warned that:

If the matter is left to the unaided efforts of local education authorities the more fortunate and the more efficient will solve their own problems. But in many areas the result will be a makeshift assembly of expedients which, from a building point of view, will bring about a depreciation of standards which will be regretted for a generation.⁵⁸

⁵²J.A. Hudson, memorandum to LEAs, November 9, 1965 (DES papers, National Archives, ED 150/30).

⁵³*Ibid.*

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

⁵⁵Internal memo, A&B Branch, October 1, 1965 (DES papers, National Archives, ED 150/30).

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷*Ibid.*

⁵⁸*Ibid.*

When estimates were prepared for the anticipated ROSLA building programme due to come on stream from 1968, earlier figures of £109 million had to be raised by £41 million. A&B made it clear that the shortfall could be met if three assumptions were accepted. These were, first, that most new provision would consist of extensions to existing schools, which would be cheaper because there would be no addition of large external or communal areas and there would be relatively few additional maintenance costs. Second, forms of construction for extensions would have to be used which would not be acceptable for complete new schools. Third, the costs would have to be limited to 20% below the per pupil costs of orthodox buildings. The urgency of the situation was highlighted by a survey of schools located in Southampton, West Suffolk, London, Lancashire, Surrey and Leeds undertaken by a senior administrative officer, a quantity surveyor, an architect and an inspector who found in many places that 16-year-old pupils staying on to follow examinable courses 'were found studying in all sorts of cubby-holes; in cupboards, under stairs, in stores, along corridors, and so on'.⁵⁹

The A&B Branch was coming to the view that the problems ROSLA presented and to which they were being tasked to provide solutions would require a fundamental response rather than a piecemeal approach:

... to an increasing extent, it is necessary to think of additional boys and girls kept at school by the raising of the of the school leaving age as fitting into a large school with courses up to the age of 18, rather than as an addition at the top of a conventional secondary modern school.⁶⁰

Therefore, nearly two years after the decision for ROSLA to 16, it is clear that government and LEAs had not fully grasped the scale of practical and implementation issues which such a move would create. As it stood, the existing system that had been growing since the mid-1940s was not equipped to absorb yet another full cohort, especially given the widespread assumption that older pupils would be reluctant learners with little interest in the traditional curriculum. Nonetheless, in the face of so many problems, LEAs were at least working towards a fixed date for ROSLA, which was essential given the long lead-in times required for increased staffing and building, as well as the need to gear budgets to robust planning for schools in the future.

Thus, when the Government announced in January 1968 extensive cuts in public spending including a delay for ROSLA to 1972 and reducing allocations for projects that had not yet received approval, the already overburdened system was thrown into turmoil. Sir William Alexander, the influential secretary of the Association of Education Committees, exclaimed that this deferment would be deplored by almost everybody in the education service because 'all plans relating to the re-organization of secondary education have been prepared on the assumption, indeed, the assurance, that the school leaving age would be raised to 16'.⁶¹

Further problems arose from the restriction of school starts following Circular 6/68. This led to an immediate fall in the volume of new projects in the very years that would lead up to implementation of ROSLA to 16. Starts on new schools fell from 101 in 1968 to 83 in 1969 and 79 in 1970. New starts had to be delayed to subsequent

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

⁶¹Sir William Alexander, 'Week by Week', *Education*, January 19, 1968, 90.

years, with the largest building expenditure falling in the same year that ROSLA was to be introduced. H.O. Dovey from the DES noted somewhat hopefully that:

Provided that we announce allocations to authorities for all three years at the same time, and give them sufficient notice for them to start the projects covered by the £45 (m) in the third year early in the year, so that they are completed by September 1973, I think that the formula is worth agreeing to.⁶²

In effect, this meant that elsewhere the hotted provision that A&B Branch were so concerned about would become an option to be taken up by head teachers and school governors alongside the additional, smaller designs contained within *Building Bulletin No. 32*.

One of the reasons the Wilson government felt able to recommend delay was outlined in the Cabinet discussion paper on public expenditure, in which the LEAs' problems in attempting to provide for secondary school reorganisation and the rising school numbers brought about by growing voluntary staying on rates were made clear.⁶³ The LEAs were working to the extent of their capacity trying to accommodate existing needs, and were not making sufficient anticipatory provision for the eventuality of ROSLA to 16. This resonated with sceptics and opponents both of ROSLA and of comprehensive reorganisation. Sir Herbert Andrew, the permanent under-secretary at the DES, privately expressed this concern following a meeting with the AEC:

It was thought that some LEAs, who were working to a long timetable for reorganisation and were therefore planning entirely on the assumption that the leaving age would be raised, would set back their plans for two years rather than work out a fresh scheme.⁶⁴

Thus, delaying the measure to increase the leaving age not only made policy disjointed, it also impacted on educational change more broadly by providing a pretext for inaction on secondary reorganisation. The building issue was central to this wider picture.

Building Bulletin No. 32 offered a potential economic and practical solution to these problems. Cheap units which would separate older students from the main school, manufactured off-site and assembled in a matter of days during school holidays, were rolled out in much the same way as the HORSAs programme of two decades earlier. A&B Branch 'put forward practical suggestions for a range of building using standard components to provide extra teaching accommodation at secondary schools which have to expand because of the raising of the school leaving age'.⁶⁵ The use of the word 'extra' reveals an acknowledgement that postwar planning had failed to take account of existing legislation for ROSLA under Section 35 of the 1944 Act. By the mid-1960s, some further form of ad hoc accommodation was becoming a necessity in hundreds of relatively new secondary schools as well as in

⁶²H.O. Dovey to Miss W. Harte, November 7, 1968; see also J.R. Jameson to Mr Dovey, November 6, 1968 (DES papers, National Archives, ED 207/121).

⁶³Cabinet discussion paper on economic policy (public expenditure), Part 9, February 23, 1968 (Prime Minister's papers, National Archives, PREM 13/3168).

⁶⁴Sir Herbert Andrew, memo to Secretary of State, January 1969; redraft on deferment of ROSLA programme (DES papers, National Archives, ED 203/4).

⁶⁵*New Problems in School Design: Additions to the Fifth Form* (Building Bulletin no 32), paragraph 11, 3.

others that had already been extended piecemeal from older buildings. These were further additions to the already uncomfortable and unsightly agglomeration of buildings, usually clustered away to the rear of the main school.

In March 1972, the DES was able to report on how the ROSLA building allocations had been spent around the country. It reported wide variations of practice with some adopting either A&B designs (for example Nottingham and Redbridge) or locally devised variants (such as Surrey).⁶⁶ In such cases there was an emphasis on practical and craft areas and flexible spaces that could be altered depending upon requirements. Elsewhere, the allocations were incorporated into whole-school plans so that provision for the extra year was absorbed into the main building. A variant on this was the provision of a new upper school in Northampton in order to ease pressure on existing secondary schools. Where rolls had been falling due to population shifts, but would remain steady due to the addition of another year group, additional facilities were built, such as a new sports hall. In many authorities, provision for ROSLA was fully incorporated into comprehensive reorganisation plans. Elsewhere, the money was actually spent on altering primary and middle school provision by changing the leaving age further down the system, thus reducing rolls in secondary schools. Centralisation had not quite imposed itself upon a still vigorously independent and locally based system, but this tension between central government financial controls and local autonomy had produced unevenness in provision for the older pupils, many of whom were spending their days in classrooms that were adequate in size but in buildings that offered limited open internal areas for free and easy circulation.

Margaret Thatcher, who as Secretary of State for Education in the new Conservative Government under Edward Heath from June 1970 had resisted Treasury attempts to clip school capital budgets, made the Government's position clear, saying:

I have been delighted by the imaginative response from those authorities who are using to advantage the purpose-built and cheap semi-standardized unit recommended in the Building Bulletin.⁶⁷

This was not the intention of the A&B Branch led by Hudson and Lacey, but their work of five years earlier had become reduced to achieving the cheapest solution for the further schooling of the 'Newsom' pupils. Thatcher was to continue the departmentally led policy inherited from the previous administration of skewing building starts for secondary schools to those regions where voluntary staying on rates had been lowest. This was because it followed that the rise in absolute numbers within schools would be highest in those areas.

By September 1972, the secondary school system presented a varied pattern of preparedness, much of which arose from short-term expedience rather than systematic planning. In many schools, fifth-formers were placed into what came to be known as ROSLA blocks, built to A&B specifications outlined within *Building Bulletin No. 32*. Elsewhere, pupils were housed in various types of hatted accommodation. In others, assimilation into the normal settings and routines of the existing buildings shaped the experience of the 16-year-olds. A fortunate few

⁶⁶The summary reports on readiness for ROSLA can be found in DES papers, National Archives, ED 272/4.

⁶⁷Margaret Thatcher, speech at Royal Festival Hall, March 16, 1971, B. Turner, ed., *Raising the School Leaving Age* (London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1971), 27–36.

entered a new, purpose-designed school reflecting the best of the thinking in Chapter 11 of the Newsom Report. Moreover, these variations and limitations made for a diversity of experiences. Senior Inspector D.G. Lambert undertook a review of the first year of ROSLA in 1974 and, in relation to building and accommodation issues, concluded that a great majority of schools had sufficient resources to implement their curricular plans. However, he noted problems caused by industrial action amongst building workers, late arrival of prefabricated accommodation, great rises in the costs of materials and continuing problems arising due to the simultaneity of school reorganisation and ROSLA. Lambert's review highlighted continuing problems of a lack of facilities and space for the social needs of older pupils.⁶⁸

What this reveals is that although many of the key players thought they were working in concert and sharing a joint mission reflecting a broadly progressive post-war consensus, there appeared to be fractures and miscalculations, which necessitated improvisation in ways of accommodating needs. Despite the best will on all sides, frameworks for extensive consultation such as the Schools Council enquiries, substantial Ministry research and development capacity, a broad political consensus not just between parties but also between central and local government and a growing professionalisation of local government, the pattern of school provision that came into being was not fully suited to the needs of older pupils.

Conclusions

ROSLA, first to 15 and then to 16, and the school building programme were both necessary and important aspects of the concerted drive to achieve secondary education for all in England in the postwar period. The school building programme was crucial if the demands for ROSLA were to be met, and it succeeded in its prime object. Nevertheless, it was achieved at some cost in terms of the compromises involved. HORSAs in the 1940s and ROSLA blocks in the 1960s were the most obvious outward and visible signs of such compromise. Such constructions were often, as Maxwell-Hyslop had complained in the 1940s, 'aesthetically revolting and a blot on the countryside'. Moreover, responses to the Crowther Report after 1959 were indeed 'tempered with a realism' that blunted and indeed tended to undermine the idealist zeal of the A&B Branch, leading LEAs to take the 'easy way out' in constructing 'rows of huts'. For many pupils after 1947 and 1972 a substantial aspect of their later school experience took place inside accommodation that was viewed as 'temporary', or in added-on facilities that were not part of the original school plan. The pressures that gave rise to HORSAs and ROSLA blocks were clearly mainly financial in nature. The sudden growth of school rolls caused by ROSLA gave rise to arguments for economies of scale that were interpreted in narrow economic ways. This marginalised wider social participation and the potential benefits that might have accrued.

These costs were also not simply short-term in their nature and consequences. The vast bulk of the postwar secondary school building estate came under review in the *Building Schools for the Future* programme in the early twenty-first century. Faults within the estate were identified, which arose from the cutting of costs with materials, lack of durability arising from construction techniques originally

⁶⁸D.E. Lambert, Review of ROSLA, November 1975 (DES papers, National Archives, ED 233/7).

envisaged for smaller, primary-age children, and crossing certain lines in building specifications such as encouraging multiple use of certain facilities thus increasing the rate of depredation of the fabric.⁶⁹

At the same time, it should be acknowledged that the problematic financial and organisational circumstances in which successive phases of raising the school leaving age have taken place appear not to have compromised a sense of broad progress in educational provision and in the welfare of young people. Reflecting back upon the past period in the mid-1960s, Shena Simon argued that:

Of course, we cannot have all the new buildings by 1970. But we have never had perfect conditions for raising the age. We have had make-shift schemes at first, temporary classes in playgrounds, over-crowded classes, lack of equipment for the older children, yet, after a period, things have settled down, and from the beginning young adolescents have been protected from the labour market for another year. Looking back to 1947, can you deny that, on balance, the children profited?⁷⁰

It was above all this undaunted optimism that served to sustain and justify the pursuit of ROSLA in the face of the costs and difficulties that it entailed.

The analysis developed in this paper has also demonstrated that ROSLA, and the school building programme that it necessitated, formed a key part of educational debates between the 1940s and 1970s, rather than being marginal to concerns over the development of secondary education that led eventually to comprehensive reorganisation. Indeed, while they have often been obscured by the arguments around comprehensivisation, ROSLA and the school building programme were no less significant for the further development of secondary education than the spread of comprehensive schools. Furthermore, they were also important in the longer term for the early impetus that they gave to the centralisation of the education system that would culminate in the tightly controlled regime of the 1988 Education Reform Act. Discussions around ROSLA and school building raised key issues concerning effective coordination and strategic planning, even before the curriculum, examinations, teachers and organisational issues provided a broad basis for more active political control from the centre.

In the early 21st century, further educational reforms have led to a similar combination of circumstances, with an ambitious programme of *Building Schools for the Future* allied to an extension of educational participation to the age of 18. The fall of the Labour government and the coming to power of a Conservative-Liberal coalition led to the curtailment of *Building Schools for the Future*, and, although the extension of the participation age was confirmed, it was subject to stringent budgetary limits.⁷¹ These developments together served to provide the basis for

⁶⁹P. Woolner et al., *School Building Programmes: Motivations, Consequences and Implications* (Newcastle: University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 2005), 40. The University of Newcastle upon Tyne conducted two reviews of writing about school building programmes in 2004/2005. The two studies were carried out on behalf of the Design Council and the CfBT, two charitable organisations supporting the current school regeneration programme. See also e.g. M. Dudek, *Architecture of Schools* (Oxford: Architectural Press, 2000), and H. Clarke, *Building Education* (London: Institute of Education, 2002).

⁷⁰Shena Simon to Alastair Hetherington (editor of *Manchester Guardian*), January 13, 1966 (Manchester Guardian archive, University of Manchester, C3/S62/110).

⁷¹*Times Educational Supplement*, FE News, report, 'Staying power: the battle to raise the participation age', February 11, 2011, 4-5.

further debates and compromises in the years ahead. ROSLA and the school building programme between the 1940s and 1970s comprise a salutary reminder of the shape that such compromises have taken in the past, and the lasting consequences that they can entail. It may not be long before we are able to identify a true successor in the lineage of the HORSA hut and ROSLA block.

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